



G. Murray sculp

J. PRIESTLEY, LL.D. F.R.S.

Published April 20 1794 by H. Simmonds



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CHARACTER
OF
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D^{R.} PRIESTLEY,

CONSIDERED AS A

PHILOSOPHER, POLITICIAN, AND DIVINE.

WITH

A SHORT ACCOUNT

OF THE

RISE, PROGRESS, AND ESTABLISHMENT

OF THE

ARIAN AND SOCINIAN DOCTRINES.

LONDON:

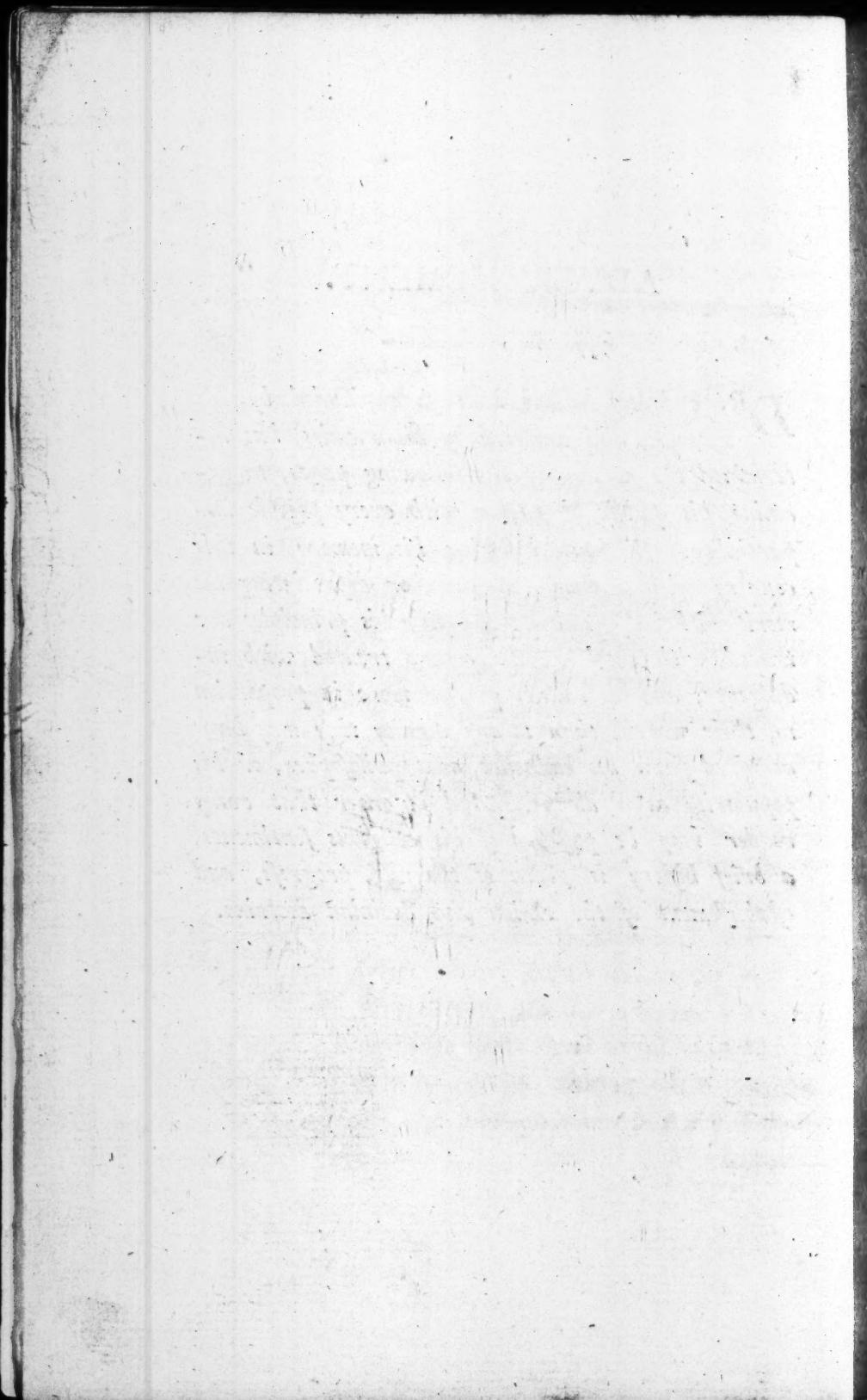
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ADVERTISEMENT.

DR. Priestley having been so applauded by his Friends, and censured by his enemies, has determined the writer of the following pages, to examine his public character with every possible impartiality. Without insulting his memory in this country with fulsome panegyric, or depreciating his merit with indiscriminate obloquy, his principles are traced with candour, his errors treated with indulgence, and his talents praised more in proportion to their worth, than to any dignity they may have acquired from his eminence as a philosopher, or his popularity as a divine. And in order that every reader may be possessed of his religious sentiments, a brief history is given of the rise, progress, and establishment of the Arian and Socinian doctrine.



Dr. Priestley's Character, &c.

THE character Dr. Priestley has established as a Philosopher, Politician, and Divine, would alone render an impartial review of his merits particularly interesting to every lover of science and distinguished talent. But his actions, writings, and sentiments having been subjects of such general controversy as almost to form a memorable era in political and religious enquiry, Dr. Priestley may be considered as an author of the first importance. Every person concerned in ascertaining the true principles which should direct his conduct as a member of the church and the state, should be careful to form their sentiments without partiality to the popular writer, or that prejudice which is too frequently excited by the envious or malignant.

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Without entering into a fastidious criticism of his style, the object of these pages will be to examine those civil, political, and religious principles, that have been so much the admiration of his friends, and the obloquy of his enemies.

Although he is the avowed opposer of the established systems of church and state, his sentiments should be examined with equal coolness and candour. By this means his zeal and talents may be found to deserve every praise, while his errors, arising more from the intemperance of enthusiasm than depravity of principle, claim indulgence instead of invective.

Bred a Dissenting Minister, his education, habits of study, objects of pursuit, and temporal connections, must have all necessarily united to form a disposition repugnant to those civil and religious restraints the State have adopted in favour of their own political and religious establishments. And in proportion to what the mind suffers from partial restrictions, however wisely adopted, sentiments of repelling must arise. When the feelings are hurt in consequence of confined opinions---whether in matters of faith or policy, reason revolts against the evil and becomes the champion

of

of natural liberty. To this principle, more than to any mischievous intention of subverting the government, may be ascribed the extent of opposition there must exist in a country where difference of religious opinion suffers under such partial conditions as deprive individuals of any rights they see other fellow citizens enjoy in common. The greatest circumspection should, therefore, be adopted by the statesman and divine to avoid irritating the wounded with cruel persecution, or unmanly insult. When a government finds it necessary, in order to preserve its own establishments, to limit the honours and enjoyments of any class of citizens, the greatest indulgence should be allowed to the complaints of such as are the sufferers. For, if there be a species of tyranny more cruel than another, it is that which forbids the afflicted to lament. And in proportion to the energy of the sufferer's mind, his indignation must be awakened and his complaints embittered. Finding himself injured as a citizen, he abandons, in disgust, the social compact, and seeks resource in vindicating his natural liberties as a man. Naturally attached to society, he associates with his companions in distress, and communicates his sentiments of personal liberty, which encrease in their extent and ardour by reciprocal

converse and commiseration. The policy, therefore, of persecuting the injured for their daring to complain, is equally weak, pusillanimous, and contemptible. Great causes never derived protection or support from the little means of individual persecution.

Having thus briefly stated a general vindication of his conduct, without attempting to approve of his principles as a Dissenter, Unitarian, Gnostic, or Socinian, his character will be now more particularly considered with regard to his politics, philosophy, and divinity.

As a politician, his sentiments have arisen more from his situation as a divine, than as an absolute statesman. Being a professor of tenets that subjected him to political inconveniences, his enquiries have been directed to the source of government, in order to find on what authority the national liberties of man were to be partially limited. Suffering a diminution of civil liberty from his religious profession, he has been more anxious to resort to first principles for arguments against the existing government, than to view impartially the necessity which obliges every state to depart from first principles, when existing circumstances

cumstances render their continuance dangerous. Zealous in the cause of his religious opinions, his arguments are always dictated by a fervid imagination; which sometimes misleads equally his temper and judgment. An enemy to all political restraint, he is the advocate of every reform, and every revolution that seems, in his mind, to promise the least encrease of civil liberty!

This impression, may, in some measure, apologize for the warmth with which he commenced, and has indiscriminately continued to be, the advocate of the proceedings in France. Instead of being, as he has been most unjustly and illiberally accused, the friend of absurdity, rapine, murder, and sacrilege, his actions and sentiments have no other source but an ardent anxiety to contribute to the universal felicity of man, by promoting every means that may unite as nearly as possible, natural with political liberty? Animated in the pursuit of this invaluable object, he leaves the examination of our local state and circumstances to bring examples from countries where this happiness appears to be established. The unlimited toleration of religion in America, he adduces as an irresistible argument to prove, that it may, and ought to be established here, and in every other country. Being in the habit

habit of considering politics only in the relation they bear to religion, his knowledge of practical government is too limited for him to decide the question with propriety. Without considering that the organization of a State may be such as to render a free toleration the cause of destroying all order, property, and security, he would adopt the good without considering the extent of the evil.

His opinion is, that political liberty consists in the power from which the members of the state reserve to themselves of arriving at public offices. This is certainly one of the first principles on which the social compact was formed. But this liberty may be forfeited by departing from original establishments. If the condition of a compact is in any one instance broken, liberty becomes proportionably abridged. Common justice as well as national safety demands the sacrifice. Thus may the governed and the governors be abridged in their privileges and prerogatives. Kings as well as subjects, by breaking the social compact, should be liable to the same suspension of power. For there is no tenure, according to the original and fundamental principles of government, can secure a right forfeited by a breach of agreement.

His

His having investigated his natural independence as a man, his sentiments have given his enemies too great an opportunity of accusing him of seditious intentions. To support this censure, the following, among several other unqualified assertions, is quoted from his Essay on the First Principles of Government: "If government, though legal and constitutional, has not made sufficient provision for the happiness of the people, no other property or title, by which it may be dignified, ought to shelter it from the generous attack of the noble and daring patriot." This is a bold assertion and may operate upon an irritated multitude so as to sanction their disposition to outrage. But surely it is no new axiom in politics to state that man has an undoubted right to oppose every principle that, from an abuse of government, tends to oppress instead of affording him that protection he ought to receive. The right of man to secure his life, privileges and property against violation, has been an acknowledged principle with all legislative writers in all ages. To condemn, therefore, Dr. Priestley for seditious motives from the adoption of this sentiment, is not only a tacit avowal that the government does not make sufficient provision for the happiness of the people,
but

but a dereliction of the first principle that can preserve the welfare and existence of any community whatever.

His sentiments of natural right are only a repetition of what the best and most celebrated ancient and modern political writers have uniformly and unreservedly declared. They are, therefore, not to be condemned as the opinions of a writer who has raised against him an outcry of church and state defenders. He has only revived principles they must have read and ought never to have abandoned. Whatever may be the connexion, relative dependence, or future expectance of the politician or divine, they should not suffer either to predominate over the principles of social and individual justice. If they do they must expect to be reminded of their secession from their duties as citizens, by those who know the enormity of such a moral, civil, and political delinquency. If their conduct has extorted from him the revival of sentiments which were the greatest compliment to the ages when they were delivered, and which can never be subverted without the annihilation of national justice, they should take to themselves the shame and disgrace they would attach to his character. And if from the repeated remon-

remonstrances against the abuses of government being disregarded, Dr. Priestley has been impelled to declare, that “Governors will never be awed ‘by the voice of the people so long as it is a ‘mere voice, without overt acts.’” The reader is left to determine where the censure is due, and to apply it accordingly. But *Cave quid dicas.*

Those who would condemn Dr. Priestley for his political assertions and principles, should have chosen more exceptionable passages than such as are sanctioned by the most enlightened, and are supported by the irresistible sentiments of reason and justice. Every person who derives honour or emolument from possessing either an executive, administrative, legislative, military, or judicial situation in a government, is certainly amenable for his public conduct to the people with whose interests he is entrusted. Dr. Priestley has surely, therefore, said no more than the truth in asserting, that kings, senators, and nobles are the servants of the public, and accountable to the people. It would, indeed, be “turning the ‘world upside down,” as one of his opponents* has endeavoured to prove is Dr. Priestley’s mean-

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* A small whole length of Dr. Priestley.

ing, could ever the servant have the right of acting independent of those from whom he received his authority. Although we have seen in many governments, the servants of the public violate principles of national justice in order to persecute devoted individuals, yet this can never destroy the unalienable right of controlling those who are liable to abuse the power you only gave them to promote your welfare.

Although he is anxious that all who have not, by crime or embecility, forfeited the right of a citizen, should enjoy it in common with the rest of the community, he has no intention to overturn establishments. His zeal to restore to those, who are excluded from the enjoyment of civil and political authority, eminence, or emolument, the rights that every member of a community should possess, animates his sentiments, and has sometimes inflamed his passions. Could his calmer arguments have induced the government to extend the privileges the church of England enjoys to his and every other religious sect, he would undoubtedly have proved a defender instead of a subverter of establishments. But despairing of ever seeing this glorious era without the most strenuous exertions of the people, he has no doubt

doubt given his sentiments in such a manner as might have tended to awaken them from that supine lethargy in which he conceived they had fallen. Had he taken a more comprehensive view of the politics of this country, he must have seen the hazard and difficulty that would attend the extension of privilege to the Dissenters. The manner in which the admission of so large a body to corporative offices, political authorities, and clerical dignities, would operate against the friends of government, will ever prevent its being adopted by any administration whose support immediately depends on those who possess appointments in the church and state establishments. Before so desirable an object can be obtained, the influence of the crown must be no longer necessary to render efficient the executive part of the constitution. Whenever this happy period shall arrive, then every individual, whatever may be his opinions, may be admitted to the unlimited enjoyment of civil, political, and religious privileges. There will then be no danger of throwing the state into convulsions, turning the friends of government into seditious rebels, or rendering the country a prey to anarchy and depredation. But when there exists no cheering hope of the influence on which the executive government depends, being abandoned

by the possessors, or destroyed by the aggrieved, without the hazard of disorganizing the state, Dr. Priestley appears too intemperate in his zeal to wish to obtain a benefit for a part that threatens the subversion of the whole. He should also have known, that he could have no claim on the gratitude of kings who cannot promote the interests of any community of subjects without creating against him ten times the number of enemies.

His having, therefore, reminded the King, in his Familiar Letters to the Inhabitants of Birmingham, of the Dissenters being the most zealous for the revolution under King William, the accession of the House of Hanover, the suppression of the rebellions in 1715 and 1745, and being his partizans in the change of administration that happened on the debate in the House of Lords on the India Bill, proposed by Lord North and Mr. Fox, could only operate as a vindication of their character without producing the least change of conduct in their favour. But Dr. Priestley felt as a man dishonoured and aggrieved, and, therefore, suffered his feelings to hint at claims which his cooler judgement must have told him could not, in the present state of circumstances, be granted.

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Were he more dispassionate in his politics, he would not have expressed himself with that severity which has drawn upon him the vengeful persecution that has terminated in a voluntary banishment from his native country. Too sanguine in his hopes of effecting the great object of seeing established civil and religious liberty, he has felt more keenly his disappointments and sufferings. From this impartial review of his political conduct, it may be concluded that his sentiments have been dictated by the best of motives; and if he has sometimes spoken with intemperance, it is only to be attributed to the enthusiastic fervour of his principles.

PHILOSOPHER.

Dr. Priestley in this character has distinguished himself with considerable success in moral, natural, and experimental enquiries. But, however, his studies have been directed to embrace all these branches of human knowledge, his talents seem to have been more calculated to excel in the latter, than in the two former. Unwearied in his application, happy in his resources for discovery, and most fertile in his invention, there is scarcely a part of experimental philosophy that he has not either illustrated with

his

his disquisition, or enriched with new and useful experiments. His researches into optics, electricity, pneumatics, and chymical operations, have been attended with the greatest benefit to society, and credit to himself. The wonderful information that he has afforded in pneumatics, has justly entitled him to the title of being the father of a new system in this part of philosophy, that is now adopted with the greatest service to mankind. Many are the discoveries he has made by his applying the electric fluid to the purpose of investigating the nature of fixed air. By passing the spark through alkaline air, he has found that it is not only considerably enlarged in its dimensions, but that, by this means, it is rendered incapable of being absorbed by water, and that it is also rendered inflammable. He has also devised a method of determining the purity, or respirability of the air of the atmosphere, or any other permanently elastic fluid. From his experience being held greater than that of any other philosopher in this part of science, his eudiometer or instrument for mixing and measuring nitrous and other air, is preferred to any of the great number that have been contrived for the purpose.

With respect to the further properties of this air,

air, Dr. Priestley has discovered that the electric spark diminishes nitrous air about one half, and converts it into phlogisticated air, while the acid is, at the same time, deposited. Iron filings, brimstone, liver of sulphur, or iron alone, diminish and change nitrous air into phlogisticated air. The singular circumstance which he has found in these processes is that, although they are of the nature of combustion, and in the end render the air incapable of maintaining it, yet, at a certain period previous to this, the air is in such a state as to cause a candle to burn better in it than in common air, although it is entirely destructive of animal life : From this singularity, Dr. Priestley distinguishes it by the name of dephlogisticated nitrous air.

The great question in animal economy, long entertained by anatomists and physical professors, whether any of the vital air was absorbed by the blood, Dr. Priestley has determined in the affirmative by incontrovertible experiments. The above few curious discoveries are only inserted as instances of his talents in experimental philosophy, which are sufficient to raise his name among the most eminent in this part of the science of nature. His excellence seems to be that of inventing the
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most invaluable experiments, while other philosophers have had no merit but ingeniously diversifying those already in practice. With regard to his having been accused of not being so happy in explaining as in performing experiments, this may be attributed to the nature of the subjects which he has investigated. The difficulty of explaining any processes in the various combinations, analyzations, &c. of elemental existence or production is such as to render every researcher liable to the same censure. It is impossible to describe a process or experiment in chymistry or any operation of nature with that happy perspicuity with which a problem in mathematics is explained. The abstruse nature of the subjects, the difficulty of submitting their various phenomena to the purview of the senses, and the quickness which attends the mutations are so liable to escape the most penetrating observer, that it may be rather deemed a phenomenon for the human faculty to ascertain the wonderful truths daily discovered in experimental science. Considering, therefore, the extreme difficulty of ascertaining abstract properties in an element like the air, which cannot be submitted to the power of vision, Dr. Priestley deserves the greatest admiration for having been able so completely to explain his new experiments

as to convey the truth, and the process to the power of every philosopher's investigation.

The variety of discoveries he has made in the different species of atmospheric, phlogisticated, vital, inflammable, fixed, nitrous, alkaline, and vitriolic airs, have been so well explained by him as to be now used, in various combinations, with the most salutary effects to human nature. Disorders that were deemed incurable before, are now relieved by water properly saturated with particular air, agreeably to the discoveries of this most eminent philosopher. The manner in which contagion has been spread by infectious air is now so clearly understood, that means are successfully applied for preserving mankind from epidemical afflictions. Such are the valuable tendency and consequences of his enquiries. Instead, therefore, of his philosophy being dreaded as dangerous to the community, it ought to be venerated as one of the greatest benefits he could confer on his fellow-creatures. Whatever may have been the dislike to his religious sentiments, it could only operate, with the weakest and most prejudiced of minds, against his philosophic researches. But while this tribute is paid to his merits, impartiality will not suffer us to pass unnoticed the freedom with which he ac-

cuses his antagonists of bigotry, extreme weakness, and superstition. However elevated above the common herd of polemical disputants, he may have considered himself in science, his superiority would have been more supported by his moderation. Persons are rather to be pitied than condemned for their ignorance. And nothing can possibly depreciate the merit of ability more than presuming upon superiority. To this may be attributed that acrimony, with which the disputes between Dr. Priestley and others have been conducted. Thus, he has almost been accused of blasphemy, in the moment of retaliation, by those he has deemed the most absurd and contemptible hypocrites. Animated with the progress he made in philosophy, he applied its principles as the standard of religion. So far did he extend his views of establishing this as a rule, for ascertaining that truth which should direct mankind in their duties towards their creator, themselves, and their neighbour, that he directed the youth of our universities to refuse receiving divinity, otherwise than as they received philosophy. But, in this, it appears, Dr. Priestley has extended philosophy beyond its province. Were religion only to be believed, or practised but in proportion to the knowledge individuals have acquired in philosophy, millions must necessarily

farily be infidels, from not being able to acquire this science. Philosophy is certainly one of the greatest blessings and embellishments the human mind is capable of receiving. But, when it is applied to subvert divinity, it becomes the curse and scourge of human nature. To the abuse of philosophy may be attributed all the sects, schisms, heresies, and infidelities that have filled the world with dissention, broken the ties of social happiness, and stimulated man to commit every outrage to gratify his envy, pride, avarice, and ambition. Every person who has wished to establish a reputation by singularity of opinion, has sanctioned his subversion of established truths with the boasted name of philosophical discovery. To this may be ascribed the absurdities of those disquisitors, who, leaving the ancient guides to intellectual knowledge, have denied, on one side, the existence of every particle of matter, while others have contended, that nothing but matter can have an existence. When philosophers themselves so widely differ in their opinions on what is the essential principle of existence, how can they presume to be so enlightened as to propose their tenets as the basis of religious faith and duty? While teachers disagree, what---but prejudice or partiality can induce their pupils to adopt the precepts of either? They have no other means of directing their

opinions to the attainment of truth, but recurring to that original source from whence all intellectual knowledge must flow. Instead of making religion depend on what the sense can discover by chemical analysis, or combination, the permanent principles of universals should be the objects of their attainment. The energies of intellect are not to be measured by observations of sensual observance. However matter may be pursued through its infinite divisions, mutations, and directions, incorporeal truths it can never ascertain. The region of the mind is the only school where truth dispenses her precepts to direct human nature in the principles of universal morality. There the divine truths taught us by Plato, Pythagoras, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, &c. were acquired. There these philosophers found lessons which taught mankind the eternal existence of a beneficent Almighty, the immortality of the soul, and the intellectual principles of beauty, virtue, and wisdom. If, therefore, religion is to be founded on philosophy, let it be that love and search of wisdom which the ancients practised. But not the modern mode of philosophizing, of which it may be truly said---whether they study wisdom or not, wise they are not ; because wisdom can never be found which is not sought with perseverance and propriety.---*Sive ergo Sapientiae student, sive non student, sapientes.*

*Sapientes non sunt, quia nunquam reperire potest, quod aut non recte quæritur, aut omnino non quæritur *.*

DIVINE.

AS a religious professor, he is only to be viewed as the advocate of other's opinions. Arius and Socinus are the persons to whose doctrine he is devoted. Without attempting to found, like them, a new sect, or direct others into new modes of practice, as he has done in philosophy, he has contented himself with following a doctrine that has existed at least fourteen centuries. Anxious to attain the truth in religion, as he has done, in many instances in experimental philosophy, he is found to have been a Trinitarian, an Arian, a Semi-arian, a Gnostic, and, finally, a Socinian. From the examination of the opinions of these sects, his change of sentiment may be more charitably supposed to have happened from a conviction of error than from an instability of principle.

As a Socinian, the following is the creed he may be thought to support, profess, and maintain. Jesus Christ is a man who had no existence before he was born of the virgin, and, therefore, one God is only to be adored without distinction of persons: That God

* Laetantius de falsa sapientia.

God was but one person, of whom Jesus Christ was the word or speech which announced his will; and that the Holy Ghost was no other than the execution of his omnipotence. That God had no son by nature; if he had a son, it was by adoption, and that the person who enjoyed this title was Jesus Christ, called the son of God, because he had been formed in a virgin, by the omnipotence of God, and that divine operation which Socinus called the Holy Ghost. That Jesus Christ was, by participation, even God from the sovereign power he possessed in heaven and upon earth. And that whatever else was said of the Trinity and of the incarnation were only fabulous illusions. This is the doctrine which Dr. Priestley has adopted, and is anxious to inculcate. From these tenets, it may be clearly perceived his religion derives no great support from scripture. For by denying the word, which Socinus acknowledged to be Jesus Christ to have an anterior existence to the incarnation, the first verse of the first chapter of John is denied without the least equivocation, where it says "In the beginning was the word, and the word was made God, &c." But to avoid entering into a religious controversy, that could not bring the matter to issue after volumes have been written, we shall conclude this sketch of his character, with giving a brief account of the different

different formula of the Arians, in order to shew their origin, progress, and on what principle the Socinian doctrine is founded. By this summary, our readers will be able to determine the propriety or impropriety of the religion professed by Dr. Priestley.

Arius, aspiring to the prelacy of Alexandria, disavowed the principle Alexander, the bishop of the diocese, maintained,---That the Son was equal in honour and nature to the Father. Having persevered in this avowal, Eusebius, bishop of Nicomedia, adopted the same tenets, and called a council on the death of Constantine to establish this new faith in opposition to that which was confirmed at the council of Nice, and to Athanasius patriarch of Alexandria: In this council, so undetermined were they in their opinions, that they made several formula before they could be satisfied with their own propositions. Their first formula was,---That they believed in one only God, creator of all things, and in his only Son, who had been before all ages with his Father; and by whom all had been made, and who will be King and God over all ages.

Some days after they made another,---That they believed the word Jesus Christ to be God, according
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to the scripture ; and that he was incapable of change, the image of the Divinity, the essence and the glory of his Father without any difference ; and in a word, they acknowledged the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, three distinct persons, and which are but one sentiment and will.

But, repenting of having acknowledged that the Son was the image of the Father without any difference, *απαράλλακσιον οὐκκαταστήσειν*, they made, according to the dictates of the bishop, Theophranus, another formula,---That the word was the only Son of God, begot by his Father before all ages, God perfect of a perfect God---but suppressing at the same time the words essence and substance.

But fearing that Arianism was not sufficiently disguised in this formula, they made a fourth profession of faith, in which they agreed entirely with the council of Nice,¹ except asserting that the Son was begotten---not made consubstantial with the Father.

The above council being held at Antioch in A.D. 341, which was five years after the death of Arius, and four after Constantine, the council of Eusebius in

in 347 made a sixth profession of faith, abolishing entirely the word *consubstantial*.

Constans dying in the year 350, the Arians began to encrease, and to avow more openly their principles under their patron Constantius, who favoured the sect from the persuasions of his wife Eusebia, who was bred an Arian.

In their eighth formula, declared in 357, they rejected both the terms of *consubstantial* and *like in substance* δημο^τσιος and δημο^ισιος under the pretext of their not being in the scripture. They declared, at the same time, that the Father was greater than the Son in dignity, honour, splendour, and majesty, and that the Son was subject to him.

In 358, the Arians not only denied the consubstantiality---but also the perfect resemblance of the Son to the Father. Here arose a division in the sect. Before the Council of Nice, they were pure Arians. During the life of Constantine they more cautiously affected to be Catholics through fear of exile. But, after the death of this great prince, they were nearly all Semi-Arians, by contenting themselves with denying simply the consubstantiality

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and condemning the other propositions of Arius. But after the Council held at Ancyra, they divided themselves into high and low Arians, who condemned each other in their separate Convocations. The pure Arians followed the original tenets of Arius, while the Semi-Arians asserted that the Son of God was like in substance to his Father, *εμοιόςτος*. The one held that the Word began to be before ages; and the other, that it had been from all eternity, although they maintained, like all the other Arians, that he was not of the same substance as the Father.

In a word, after a variety of changes adopted by further formulas, respecting the Son, in 382, the Arians extended new opinions relative to the Holy Ghost; for instead of using, Glory be to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost, in the Hymn of Glorification, they used---Glory be to the Father, by the Son, in the Holy Ghost, in order to express their avowal of the inequality of the three persons in the Trinity.

After many revolutions in different parts of the Eastern and Western Empires, where the Arians endeavoured to establish themselves during several ages, liberty was granted in 1693, to the Catholics, Protestants, Calvinists, Lutherans, and

Arians;

Arians; these sects were almost confounded in that of the Socinians, whose founder endeavoured to unite the sentiments of all the Arians in one doctrine, which is before stated.

The tenets of Lælius Socinus which Dr. Priestley must have professed in his progress through the Trinitarian, Arian, Gnostic, and Unitarian doctrines, being considerably changed by his nephew Faustus Socinus, we shall just briefly state what tenets the latter held in order to ascertain what those Dissenters really profess who adopt the Socinian profession.

Faustus Socinus not only rejected the dogmas of the Catholic Church, which the Calvinists and Lutherans had done before, but entered upon an examination of what the latter had retained, as well as those of his uncle Lælius. He pretended that the Arians had allowed too much to Jesus Christ, and declared himself a Samosatenean and Photinian. He maintained their doctrine that Jesus Christ was but merely a man, who had never existed before Mary, and thus entirely disavowed the pre-existence of the Word, i. e. Jesus Christ. He said the Holy Ghost was not a distinct person, and, therefore, the Father alone was truly and

properly God. He, however, acknowledged that the name of God had been given in the scripture to Jesus Christ; but he would not allow that it was in the same sense as to the Father. It only meant that God the Father, God alone by essence, had given him a sovereign power over all creatures, and, therefore, had rendered him adorable by men and angels. He declared, that Jesus Christ had visited heaven after his baptism in order to explain the words of Jesus Christ himself, saying, *Nemo ascendit in cælum, nisi qui descendit de cælo.* He denied the redemption of Jesus Christ, and reduced what he had done to save man, to merely having taught them the truth, given them examples of heroic virtue, and sealing his doctrine with his death. Original sin, predestination, and grace, he held as chimeras. The sacraments were, in his opinion, simple ceremonies without effect. He attributed to God the prescience of only necessary effects. He avowed the death and resurrection of the soul as well as the body; for his followers maintain that they both die and will be raised together, when the virtuous will be possessed of eternal happiness, and the wicked condemned to a fire, which, although eternal itself, will not torment the body and soul eternally. But it will consume both after a period

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proportioned to their transgressions. Admitting this doctrine, it appears the religion of Jesus Christ was never understood until fifteen centuries after it was first propagated; for it is impossible among all the sects professing christianity in any form, to find one of the same opinion as Faustus Socinus. But as the Socinians make not their opinions indispensable to salvation, they are not liable to be much incommoded by the consequences.

As a further illustration of the religion which Dr. Priestley avows himself to profess, the following sketch of the character of Socinus is given. He was of an illustrious family, and from his life, prefixed to his works that were printed in Holland, it appears that he never applied himself to either philosophy or scholastic theology. But that he only learnt something of the dialectic. This must have happened late in his life from his having spent the greater part in the court of the Duke of Florence. Filled with the prejudices of his uncle Lælius, whose writings he possessed, he conceived the idea of forming a new system in order to commence a reformer. And had he been as learned as his uncle, who had studied the Greek and Latin, he would certainly have escaped the opposition that was

was made by even his own sect. But, however, being possessed of his uncle's writings, and having more temerity than discretion, he considered himself a sufficient theologian to commence and establish a new doctrine. This presumption offended many of his fraternity who treated him as an innovator, whose pretensions had no other support than an excess of confidence in his own abilities. They also reproached him for having written with a precipitation too great for a person who pretended to found a new religion on the basis of truth undiscovered by any predecessor. This appears from the letter written to him in 1581, by Squarcialupus, and which is printed among the works of Socinus. He acknowledges in his answer, that he had studied under no master, nor had any assistance except the writings of his uncle. Others of his sect opposed his sentiments as horrid and contrary to the word of God. Among these may be reckoned Niemojevius who says in his letter sent to him in 1587, *Non sine mærore, nequid gravius addam, incidi inter legendum in quoddam paradoxon scripturæ sacræ contrarium ac plane horrendum, dum Christum in morte, sive in cruciæ sacrificium obtulisse pernegas.*

In a word, it appears from all his works that
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he had more subtilty and fineſſe, than judgment and ſolidity. And that, instead of having the abi- lity, or being diſpoſed to form a religion from theological reſearches into the arca na of truth, he first pro poſed to himſelf a ſy ſtem, and then en- deavoured to pervert and apply ſacred authorities to ſupport the dogmas he wi ſhed to eſtabli ſh as a new reformer.

In all the circle of opinion in Theology, to which a liberal enquiry into nature could direct a phi- ſopher, there is ſcarcely any that appears ſo un- deſerving adoption, as what appears to be the So- ci ni an principles. Without any reference to truth or a deſire to follow its precepts, this doctrine ori- ginated in envy, was conducted with hypocriſy and cow ardice, and finally eſtabli ſhed by temerity and an avowed ignorance of any fundamental knowledge. Had it originated from a con vi cti on of absurdity in the nature of things to have diſowned the divinity and pre-exi ſtence of Christ, the arguments adduced would have claimed ſerious examination. But when its ſource is derived from envy, cabal, and intrigue, a man of ſcience, like Dr. Pri eftley, mu ſt ſurely have had a ſtrange predilection to have ſuffered him ſelf to follow in divinity ſo blind a guide when in phi losophy he has ſo ſucceſſfully guided others.

Had

Had he not so implicitly followed the dogmas of so unfounded and unlearned a reformer, his character would have been more illustrious. Although it may seem to common sense absurd to believe that three essences can unite in one principle of existence, yet had Dr. Priestley philosophized so far as to have adverted to the human mind, he would have there found three essences, that, if separated, would not only destroy the unity, but the being itself of the mind. The will, memory, and understanding in the intellect, are separate powers that can never be totally abstracted from each other without the destruction of that unity which forms the mind. If, therefore, three distinct powers are known to exist in the intellect, which may be considered as an emanation from the divinity, where is the absurdity or difficulty of believing, that the source of the mind itself may consist of three indivisible persons or powers?



